



EDUCATORS GUIDE

Teaching Revision with Google Docs and *Writing for Teens* magazine

Want to create an innovative, exciting revision experience for your students? Following are curriculum suggestions for pairing each of the articles from *Writing for Teens* magazine with Google Docs.

▪ **[WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS: THE GIFTS OF A WRITING BUDDY](#)**

This article from Writing magazine introduces students to the benefits and guidelines of successful peer review and collaboration and engages them in a practical peer review exercise using Google Docs.

Suggested Lesson Plan:

- Print out or have students download “With a Little Help From My Friends” and read it.
- Divide students into groups of two and ask each student to select a piece of their own writing for which they would like to receive feedback.
- Have students cut and paste their selected writing into a Google Docs document. Then, ask them to invite you and a fellow student as collaborators on the document.
- Have students review and comment upon each other's work, using the tips and techniques provided in “With a Little Help.” You might wish to provide students with a starter list of questions to ask one another about their writing. These could include: *What do you think of the organization of this piece? Do you like the story, the characters? Do any words stand out as awkward? What images are strong? How would you improve this piece?*
- Ask students to revise their original piece of writing, using the feedback they have received.

Google Docs Connection: You are probably familiar with Microsoft Word's commenting features. With Google Docs, your students can engage in a live, interactive, peer review exercise. That conversation can be saved, viewed, and printed at its various stages, allowing for a fresh approach to the standard revision process. [Download a tutorial](#) on how to use the revision tools in Google Docs.

▪ WRITING'S TOP 10 TIPS FOR REVISION

This article from Writing magazine is a handy tip sheet for students. It provides memorable and practical examples of revision techniques.

Suggested Lesson Plans:

1. Have students create a piece of writing using Google Docs. Have students compare two versions of a piece of writing, separated by a period of time, say 24 hours.
2. Revise This!: [Download a reproducible skills master](#) created by the editors of *Writing*. Have students copy and paste these sentences into a new Google Docs file, and instruct them to work with a partner to revise these sentences, many of which will reinforce the lessons imparted in [Writing's Top 10 Tips for Revision](#).

Google Docs Connection: [Download a tutorial](#) on how to use the revision tools in Google Docs.

▪ CHECKLISTS FOR COLLABORATIVE AND INDIVIDUAL REVISION

Checklists make life easier. Here are two checklists that we invite you to share with your students:

- [Collaborative Checklist for Revision](#): This reproducible handout provides a checklist for using Google Docs to revise a piece of writing. Encourage your students to collaborate with a writing buddy to work through this checklist for their next writing assignment.
- [Individual Checklist for Revision](#): This reproducible handout provides a checklist for students to use once they are nearly finished with a writing assignment. It reiterates many of the suggestions in [Writing's Top 10 Tips for Revision](#).

After reviewing our activity ideas and Docs tutorials, you may develop your own lesson plans and ideas. We want to hear from you! We invite you to share your curriculum ideas with the Google Educators community through our [Google for Educators Discussion Group](#).

Google Docs is an online word processor, spreadsheet and presentation editor that can be accessed from any computer anywhere. It facilitates collaboration and peer editing and saves automatically every minute. If there is a computer failure, the document is not lost. Teachers can be collaborators and see the work students are doing in real time. Assignments can be tagged and archived for easy access.

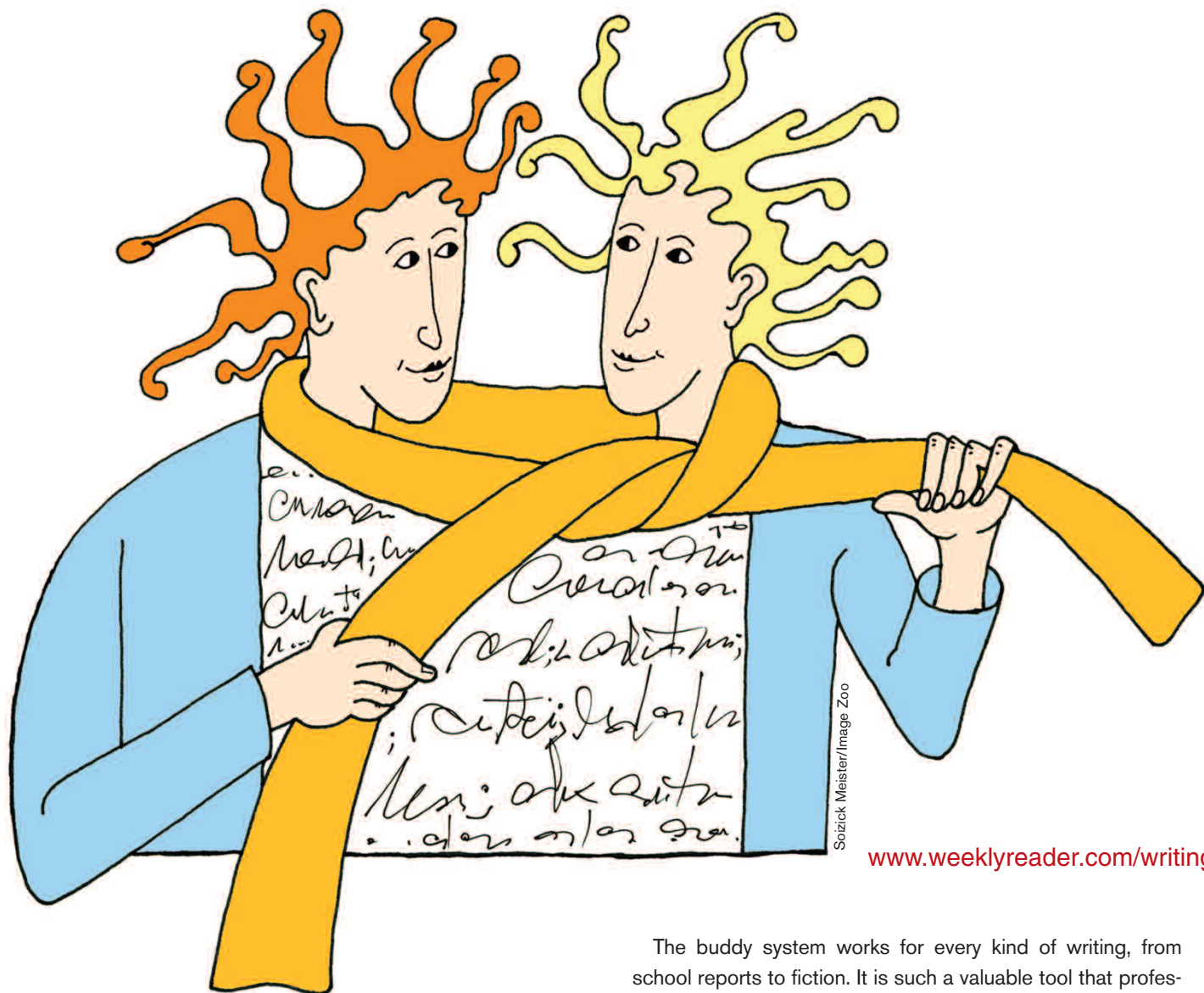
Writing for Teens magazine is a [Weekly Reader](#) classroom periodical for middle and high school students. Nominated for the 2006 Golden Lamp Award by the Association of Educational Publishers, each issue is supplemented with a Teacher's Guide and a literary [blog](#) that links content to state and national standards. For more on revision from *Writing* magazine, click [here](#).



With a Little Help From My Friends

The Gifts of a Writing Buddy

By Laura Deutsch



Solzick Meister/Image Zoo

www.weeklyreader.com/writing

YOU'VE WRITTEN YOUR ESSAY FOR ENGLISH CLASS, and you think it's pretty good. But you wonder whether a certain sentence is convoluted and whether the ending makes sense. You obsess about it for a couple of days and nibble your fingernails. Then you realize—you don't have to figure it out on your own. Writing buddy to the rescue!

Writing can often be a solitary and lonely act. Not so with a writing buddy at your side. Someone who reads and comments on your writing, a writing buddy can be a constant source of support in your creative process.

The buddy system works for every kind of writing, from school reports to fiction. It is such a valuable tool that professional writers use it frequently. For instance, suspense author Amelia Atwater-Rhodes sends her first drafts to her friends and writing buddies Ollie and Kyle. "They always get my world, even when I don't," she says.

The writing-buddy technique is a two-way street. Its value goes far beyond getting feedback. As author and writing teacher Natalie Goldberg observes, reading someone else's writing "awakens stories inside you." A good writing relationship can inspire you to move to the next level with your writing. And you might just make a great friend along the way.

Here are some rules of the road to help you get started.

Map Out a Plan

Choose a buddy who writes at the same level as you or better—someone whose feedback you respect. Writing buddies should be peers—your classmates or friends. Don't just go for talent and brains. Choose someone you like, because if the relationship works out well, you may be spending a lot of time writing and talking to each other.

Ask for What You Need

The beauty of this writing tool is that you get to ask for the kind of feedback you want. If you've done some freewriting, you might want your buddy to do no more than listen as you read it aloud—Goldberg calls this “deep listening.” There's great value for a writer in simply being heard.

For a more organized piece of writing, you'll want more specific feedback. Atwater-Rhodes suggests you ask your writing buddy questions like, “*What do you think about my character Lily?*” She does this, and it works well for her.

Start With Praise

It's a privilege to be asked to comment on someone's writing, and at the heart of the relationship is mutual respect and encouragement.

Always start giving your feedback with a compliment; this will relax your buddy and make him or her more receptive to your suggestions. Let your buddy know when you enjoy something. Use simple words. Describe your reactions: “*Good.*” “*Nice description.*” “*I'm laughing.*” Underline phrases you like, and point out sections that you'd like to hear more about. Note an original image, a strong verb, or snappy dialogue. Comment throughout the piece, and write overall comments at the end.

Give Thoughtful Feedback

As for criticism, you want your comments to be honest, but not brutal. Essayist Anne Lamott observes, “You don't always

have to chop with the sword of truth. You can point with it too.” The goal is not to rip your buddy to shreds, even if you think your suggestions are for his or her own good.

If there's a problem with your buddy's writing, frame your comment as a question or an “I” statement. Instead of “*This makes no sense,*” you might say, “*I'm not sure what you mean here.*” State your observation factually, and follow it up with a simple suggestion—for example, “*This might work better if you broke it up into two sentences.*”

Now back to that English assignment. Grab your buddy and get started! 📎



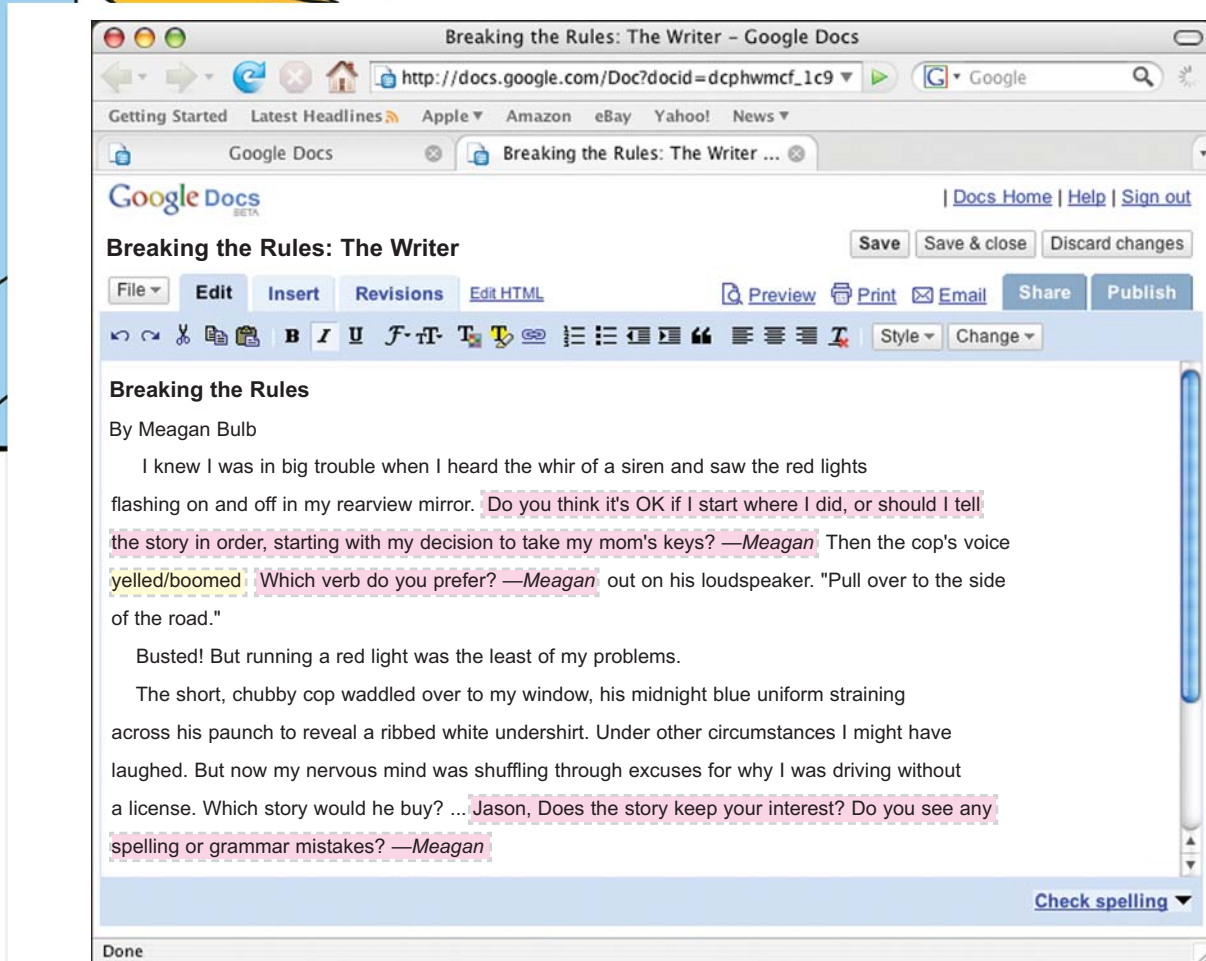
Soizick Meister/Image Zoo

“There are probably a number of ways to tell your story right, and someone else may be able to tell you whether or not you've found one of these ways.” —Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird*

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The Writer

MEAGAN'S LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHER has asked her to write an essay about "breaking the rules." Here is an excerpt of what she gives her writing buddy, Jason, to read. Notice how she inserts specific questions (in the comment boxes) after the highlighted text. She simply uses Google Docs.



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 "Rewriting is the essence of writing." —William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*
 *

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The Buddy

JASON RESPONDS (in blue) TO MEAGAN'S QUESTIONS. He also highlights some sections and makes comments about them. Then he writes a few general comments.



"I was working on the proof of one of my poems all the morning, and took out a comma. In the afternoon I put it back again."—Oscar Wilde, 19th-century author

Writing's Top 10 Tips For Revision

By Bryon Cahill

WE'VE ALL PRETENDED THAT A FIRST DRAFT is a final draft. Don't deny it; you know you're guilty of this. How many times have you waited to write a paper until the night before it was due? When you were finally done, what did you do? If you're like most procrastinators, you shoved it into your schoolbag and went to sleep, totally exhausted. Then in the morning, sitting at your desk in class, you reread what you had written the night before and fell into a pit of shame. You had known it wasn't the best thing ever written, but you hadn't realized how awful it actually was! If only you had set aside the time to revise.

Reworking what you have written is just as important as (if not more important than) putting down your original ideas and concepts. If writing a first draft is like jumping off a building, revising is like suddenly sprouting wings and taking flight.

Sounds great, doesn't it? So, then, how does a writer go about revising a draft? Where should he or she even begin?

Here's a helpful list of 10 revision tips. There are more, of course, but these are the most important tips to help you get started ... or, rather, to help you pick up where you left off—at your first draft.

1. Take Pause

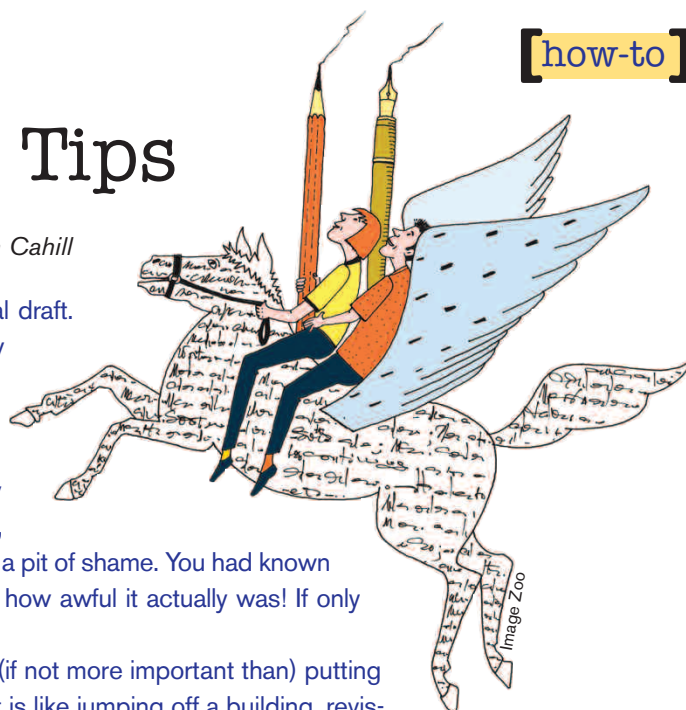
As soon as you have completed your first draft, put it away. File it in a drawer, lock it in a safe, hide it in the freezer. Put it anywhere you won't be tempted to look at it for at least 24 hours. Now breathe.

It is important to put some distance between your work and yourself. There is no set time you should stay away to detach yourself from your piece. One day should probably be the *minimum*, though. Just don't forget about your deadline (if you have one).

2. Imagine You Are Your Audience

When you are ready to come back to your work and begin the second draft, imagine yourself as the reader who is reading your work for the first time. In fact, if you read your first draft aloud, you will probably find glaring errors that silent reading would not show. What might confuse the reader? What is unclear? If you were the writer, how would you have handled things differently?

Hey, guess what? You *are* the writer! Fantastic! Now that you have seen your work from somebody else's perspective, go back into it and fix it.



You should also be sure to consider your audience. If you are writing a paper for a grade, think about what your teacher is looking for in your paper. If you are writing a story for a magazine, make sure you understand the magazine's style. If you have no intended audience, make up one. Impress the audience in your head. Somebody has to.

3. Think BIG Thoughts

What are the large issues in your writing? Can you see the piece as a whole and try to find the holes? Sure you can—but how?

Think about what you originally intended to write about when you started your project. What's your thesis or main argument? Does your paper support it with examples? Where does it stray? How can you fix those areas?

If your piece is fiction, why are you writing the story? What is the plot? Are you faithful to the plot, or does your story wander off in directions that don't move the plot forward? What about your characters? Who are they? Are they believable? Do you sense anything wrong with them? How can you make them better? More solid?

“I’m not a very good writer, but I’m an excellent rewriter.”

—James A. Michener, Pulitzer Prize-winning author

4. Cut Out Adverbs

In case you've forgotten what an adverb is, it is a word that describes a verb, an adjective, or another adverb, and it usually ends in *-ly*. Often, these bad boys are useless or redundant. Observe: *Suddenly, Pablo burst into the room.* Of course it was sudden; he burst in, after all! Don't repeat yourself; just cut out the adverb and say *Pablo burst into the room.*

The problem with adverbs is that they are almost always very unnecessary. See? Like right there. *Very*, although it does not end in *-ly*, is an adverb. And you don't really need it, do you? *Very* is OK to use sometimes, but there is probably a better way of describing something.

Mayu walked very angrily. Rework that sentence to read *Mayu stomped away.* Voilà. Adverb, be gone!

5. Go Easy on the Speech Tags

"What's a speech tag?" he queried.

A speech tag is the "he said, she said" part of your dialogue. The temptation to use wild speech tags may occur when you find yourself writing "he said, she said" all over the place. You may want to mix it up by throwing in a "he queried" or a "she pontificated." Come on, don't be silly. "He queried" is extravagant.

This is better: *"What's a speech tag?" he asked.*

Sometimes, you may not even need a speech tag! You can ignore the "he said, she said" baloney when you make the speaker obvious in other ways.

"Hey there, Laura. What's new?" Bob hadn't seen her in more than a month, and he missed the way her hair smelled.

"Not much." She threw her head back, letting loose the fresh apple scent of her shampoo.

"That's cool." Bob closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He had missed the apples.

If we keep this up for too long, though, the reader will lose track of what he and she are actually saying and focus on the ridiculousness of following every piece of dialogue with another action or thought.

"Try to find a happy medium," he said.

6. Watch Out for Weak Verbs

Weak verbs are usually some form of *to be* or a vague, actionless verb. When you use them at the beginning of a sentence, your whole thought is off to a rough start.

Consider this example:

The monkeys were a distraction to the zoo visitors.

You can improve that sentence by dropping the weak verb *were* and substituting a stronger verb up front:

The monkeys distracted the zoo visitors.

See how much more lively the sentence is when you drop a weak verb?

Watch out for weak openers like this one: *There are many bears in the woods of North America.* Remove the weak verb and substitute a punchier one: *Many bears roam the woods of North America.*

You can easily identify a weak verb by asking yourself, "Does this sentence show or tell?" If you are *telling*, you probably have a weak verb on your hands. If you are *showing*, however, you're good.

The golf course was rained on.

No, no, no. Avoid the passive voice (a form of *to be* plus a past participle). Try: *Rain is pouring down on the golf course.*

Hey, hand me that 9 iron.



"I believe more in the scissors than I do in the pencil." —Truman Capote, novelist

7. Simplify, Simplify

If you're working on a research paper of a required length, you're not going to like this tip. But listen anyway, because it's a mighty, ~~mighty~~ good one. Cut out unnecessary words ~~that do nothing extra for your sentence~~, just as you did with your adverbs. (See Grammar Slammer, page 13.)

8. Use a Thesaurus

Everyone's vocabulary is limited. If you find yourself getting frustrated because you seem to be using the same words over and over again, expand your vocabulary by consulting a thesaurus for a better or a richer word. Sometimes, it's not even about finding a "better" word; sometimes, it's just about mixing it up a little.

Be careful not to go thesaurus crazy! That can happen when you substitute every other word for some new, flashy word and, before you know it, you have a totally unrecognizable piece of writing. Sometimes your first instinct is the right one, and you should stick with it.

Here's an example:

The small accident didn't cause any damage.

The small cataclysm didn't cause any damage.

How can a *cataclysm*, a "very bad accident," not cause any damage? You would be better off sticking with *small*.

9. Don't Get So Tense

One of the most common mistakes we see in student writing submissions is the confusion of tense. Is your piece taking place in the present, or is it taking place in the past? Read the following example, and see whether you can find the tense errors.

This morning when I woke up, I immediately remembered the previous night's events. I am sitting there watching a movie about goblins and ghouls when all of a sudden, Mike screams out, "This is dumb!" and scared me half to death!

Here's a helpful tidbit: Writing in the past tense is easier than writing in the present.

10. Proofread

No one is born with the skill of proofreading. It has to be learned. Proofreading is the meticulous search for misspelled words, poor grammar, and missing or misplaced punctuation. Countless books have been written on the subject.


When proofreading, remember that your computer's spell-checker is not foolproof. For example: *Beethoven was deaf. He could not here a thing.* Do you see the mistake? If not, maybe you can *hear* it. Spell-checkers sometimes miss errors such as the use of *here* for *hear*, so look carefully for blunders as you proofread. 



Image Zoo

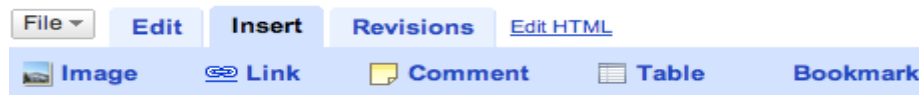
"Proofread carefully to see if you any words out." —Unknown



REVISION CHECKLIST FOR GOOGLE DOCS

Use this checklist to make sure you are an effective and helpful writing buddy

- ☐ I go to Google Docs (<http://docs.google.com>) and find my own document.
- ☐ I make sure my document title follows the format that my teacher specified. For example, with my class period, last name, first name, and title of my essay: **5Bulb, Megan: Breaking the Rules**
- ☐ I open my document, click on the Share tab and put my buddy's email address in the "Invite People" box.
- ☐ I also add my teacher's email address is also in the "Invite People" box, and then I click the "Invite collaborators" button to send them an email notification.
- ☐ I look for my buddy's essay in Google Docs (after he has added me as a collaborator).
- ☐ I read my buddy's draft aloud to look for problems:
 - ☐ Awkward sentence structure
 - ☐ Missing thesis
 - ☐ Lack of examples
 - ☐ Poor word choice
 - ☐ Punctuation errors
- ☐ I click on INSERT and then look for the COMMENTS button:



- ☐ I write a comment to my buddy about my suggestions.
 - The comment can go at the end of the paper.
 - Wherever I click, is where the comment will go
 - I can put as many comments as I think would be helpful.
 - I try to be as **specific** as possible with my suggestions.
 - Give an example of what word would be a better choice
 - Suggest an example
 - Suggest a thesis
 - Suggest ideas to improve essay